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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000288

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA, PRM FOR PRM/ANE; NSC FOR
SHAPIRO/PASCUAL; TREASURY FOR PARODI/VINOGRAD/VELTRI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2019
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SUBJECT: PA OFFICIALS BRIEFED ON NEW WEST BANK MEASURES

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Palestinian Authority (PA) security officials have received briefings from the IDF about new measures to improve conditions in the West Bank. The steps include incremental access and movement improvements, more permits for Palestinian VIPs and workers, construction of additional PA police stations, and broader authority for local Israeli Defense Force (IDF) commanders to resolve local problems. PA security chiefs welcomed the measures, but said they do not significantly change the situation on the ground or address long-standing requests to restore PA security control in Area A. End summary.

Access and Movement: Removing Three Roadblocks

¶2. (C) According to PA security officials who attended recent briefings, the IDF informed them that three West Bank roadblocks will be removed in the next few days: Silwad (northeast of Ramallah), Ras Karkar (west of Ramallah), and Bani Naim (east of Hebron). Security officials welcomed removal of the Bani Naim roadblock, saying it will open access for about 20,000 local residents to Route 60, the West Bank's main north-south artery. (Note: Removing the obstacle will save about 50 minutes driving between Bani Naim and Route 60. End note.) However, they did not view the other two openings as significant.

Easing Access to Nablus

¶3. (C) PA security officials said the GOI announced the following steps to ease the access regime for Nablus:

-- Effective February 15, West Bank residents over 50 and medical doctors of any age will be allowed to enter and exit Nablus in their private vehicles through Huwwara checkpoint without a permit. (Note: This has been announced twice before and was expected to go into effect weeks ago. End note.)

-- Effective February 14, Israeli Arabs will be allowed to enter Nablus in their own vehicles through any checkpoint, but must exit through either Awarta or Beit Furik checkpoint (east of Nablus). (Note: UN and other sources tell ConGenOffs that this may be limited to Saturdays. End note.)

Additional VIP and Work Permits

¶4. (C) PA security officials told PolSpecialist on February 12 that the GOI promised approximately 300 additional VIP-2 permits for senior PA security and other officials. The GOI also pledged to raise the number of work permits (currently 47,000) for Palestinians in Israel and West Bank settlements. PA security officials said the GOI also agreed to extend the validity period of residence permits for Gazans living in the West Bank from three months to six.

Additional Police Stations Authorized

¶5. (C) According to PA security officials, the GOI said it will permit construction of several new Palestinian police stations: in Safa and Sinjel (Ramallah area); Tqou and Husan (Bethlehem area); and Aqraba (Nablus area). The PA officials said the GOI also agreed to permit expansion of existing police stations in Obiydiya (Bethlehem area) and Beit Furik (Nablus area).

Local IDF Commanders Granted More Autonomy

¶6. (C) PA security officials said the IDF briefed on plans to grant broader authority to local commanders to resolve access and security issues in geographical areas under their command. The IDF reportedly said local commanders will meet their PA counterparts to discuss specific problems.

PA Request on Area A not Addressed

¶7. (C) PA security officials generally welcomed the new measures, but said they will not significantly change the situation on the ground. They also said the IDF failed to address a long-standing Palestinian request to restore full PA security control in Area A. They said the request has been raised repeatedly with IDF commanders, who generally respond that the issue requires a high-level political decision.

WALLES